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Pictures from Wisconsin's
Rustic Roads



Inclusion of County Highways and Local Roads as Scenic Byways Bill ([AB 518](#))

[Rep Jill Billings](#) (95) - La Crosse introduced [AB 518](#) to alter [§84.106 \(1\)](#) so that county highways and local roads, as well as numbered State and US highways could qualify as a Scenic Byway. **We urge your support of this bill!**

Background

The current limitation on designating only numbered State and US highways came from the Scenic Byways Advisory Committee formed when the Legislature considered implementing the updated Federal Scenic Byway standards in [USC 23.162](#) in 1999. The Advisory Committee made [recommendations](#) to the Legislature, which were then enacted into the statutes.

The limitation to numbered State and US highways is NOT a requirement of the Federal standards. The Advisory Committee was apparently concerned that potential Scenic Byways could end up on routes that were helter-skelter and hard to follow if not on numbered State and US highways.

However, this limitation has prevented:

- a local Wisconsin group from proposing a corresponding Scenic Byway to the [MN St Croix River Scenic Byway](#) because there is no numbered state highway that follows the River north of St Croix Falls
- the [Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive](#) from applying because so much of the route includes county highways
- any efforts to develop an Upper Wisconsin River Road from the source at Lake Vieuz Desert east of Land O Lakes, to Eagle River, to Rhinelander, to Tomahawk, to Merrill, to Wausau, to Stevens Point, to Wisconsin Rapids, to Wisconsin Dells, to Portage, to Sauk City where it would connect to the recently designated [Lower Wisconsin River Road](#) because many of the roads adjacent to the River are county highways or local roads (i.e Old Highway 51)
- inclusion of a scenic byway component to the proposed [Fox River Heritage Parkway](#) from Portage to Oshkosh, to Appleton to Green Bay again because many of the the roads adjacent to the River are county highways or local roads



The [Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive](#) dates to the 1940s but does not qualify as a scenic byway because much of the route is made up of county highways

[Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin](#) supports the Scenic Byways and Rustic Roads programs. Our 1,000+ members from across the state understand the importance of aesthetics to our rural areas as well as our urban communities, especially when it comes to quality of life, tourism and economic development. The county highways and local roads in our rural areas along with the State and US highways between our urban areas are a large part of what makes Wisconsin such a wonderful place to live and visit.

Proposed Scenic Byways

We have proposed designating a Scenic Byway from Portage to La Crosse along [State Highways 33 and 136](#). We would like to include County Hwy F and Bliss Rd by Granddads Bluff as well as Main and State Sts to Riverside Park in La Crosse County because these are two of the significant scenic features of the route; however this option is prevented under the current standards.

A local group in Bayfield County has proposed a scenic byway along State Highway 13, but if county and local roads could be included, it might be practical to include some that run along the shore of Lake Superior.



The [Great River Road](#) is one of our State's many assets and was designated in 1938 before the modern regulations were established. The [route](#) includes county highways that are closest to the River between Cassville and Prairie du Chien.

If the Great River Road were considered under the current statute, at this point the route would have to be shifted miles inland from the River in order to comply with the limitation of utilizing only State highways, essentially defeating an important purpose of the program.

Until 2009, the [Great River Road](#) was the only designated Scenic Byway in Wisconsin.

[State Scenic Byways](#) qualify for potential designation as [National Scenic Byways](#). They are marketed and promoted as destinations which have a tremendous economic and social impact on the local communities.

Designated routes also qualify for Scenic Byway grants from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Since 2000, the Great River Road has been awarded approximately \$6 million in competitive Scenic Byway Discretionary Grant Funds, often with matching grants from other sources.

Some of the prominent examples:

- 2002 - River Boat Center, Prescott \$700,800
- 2004 - Potosi Brewery, Potosi \$ 449,574
- 2005 - Potosi Brewery, Potosi \$ 397,844
- 2006 - Rieck's Landing, Alma \$ 528,000
- 2008 - Archaeological Center, Onalaska \$679,016
- 2011 - Interpretive Center, Genoa \$1,800,000

Until 2009 when State Highway 60 from Lodi to Prairie du Chien was designated the [Lower Wisconsin River Scenic Byway](#), the State only had one officially designated Scenic Byway - the Great River Road from Dubuque to Prescott. In 2010, State Hwys 42 & 57 were designated the [Door County Coastal Byway](#).

Peer States

Wisconsin now has 1 National Scenic Byway and 2 State Scenic Byways with two others in the proposal stages (State Hwys 33 & 136 from Portage to La Crosse as well as State Hwy 13 in Bayfield County).

In comparison, [Minnesota](#) has 8 National and 13 State Scenic Byways. [Illinois](#) has 7 and 1; [Iowa](#) has 2 and 8; with [Michigan](#) having 3 and 3 respectively. There are also National Forest designated byways in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin, however these do not qualify for Scenic Byways grants.

Mr. Vernie Smith
540 E. South St.
Viroqua, Wisconsin 54665

February 4, 2012

To: Assembly Transportation Committee, Rep. Jerry Petrowski Chair

Re: AB 518 SB 401 – designation of local roads as Scenic Byways

Dear Chairman Petrowski and committee members,

Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin supports Scenic Byways and enthusiastically supports this legislation to improve the program in Wisconsin.


In 2004 our organization supported the rules then being developed to implement the program, but we noted some deficiencies. This bill corrects one of those deficiencies by allowing local roads to be designated as scenic byways. Here, in part, is what we wrote in July 2004:

"The rules limit designation to state trunk highways. We feel that this is too limiting. Interstate highways as well as local highways (such as county roads or city streets) should also be eligible. We can't see any reason to exclude those routes or some combination thereof from potential scenic byway recognition. Many of those routes have outstanding scenic characteristics that make them possible candidates for designation. State and Federal byway enhancement monies could then be made available as well."

As we further noted in our 2004 support of Scenic Byways: *"Scenery is a vital part of our everyday lives. It is not something that can be neglected, or relegated to survive only in un-traveled areas, so you must make a special trip to see it... Attractive and pleasant surroundings are something we should all be able to enjoy on a daily basis whether our means are modest or otherwise, whether we live, work and recreate in the city or the countryside. Our state's quality of life and its economic health depend on a good scenic environment."*

We urge committee approval of this long overdue 'fix' to the Scenic Byway program.

Sincerely,



Vernie Smith
President, Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin

608-637-8654